

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

Where Two Or Three Are Gathered

By Chris Simmons

Jesus said in Matthew 18:20, ***“For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.”*** This is a verse that has been used by many to excuse themselves from the assembly of the church and engage in secular activities upon the first day of the week thinking God will be ***“in their midst.”*** Others will use this verse to justify the practice of serving the Lord’s Supper to others outside of the assembly such as in a hospital or care home. Was Jesus defining a local assembly as being anywhere and anytime two or more Christians are together and justifying any activity of two or three Christians? As with all of God’s word, we need to concern ourselves with the context of the verse and not draw conclusions by taking it out of its inspired context.

In a broad context, going all the way back to Matthew 18:7 and continuing through Matthew 18:35, Jesus is teaching about the seriousness of sin and the need to do everything possible to prevent it (vss. 7-10), the need to seek those entrapped by it (vss. 12-18), and the need for forgiveness (vss. 21-35). In the more immediate context of vss. 15-20, Jesus is addressing our personal responsibility to address a brother who has sinned, our efforts to restore him (cf. Gal. 6:1), and when we are to forgive him (when he ***“listens”*** and repents), and when we are to consider him as a ***“Gentile and tax-gatherer”*** (when ***“he refuses to listen”*** and repent). In our efforts to restore those who’ve sinned, Jesus sets forth three principles that we need to remember:

1. Resolve sin and offenses at the lowest level and with the fewest number of people knowing (vs. 15). ***“If he listens to you, you have won your brother.”***
2. Facts and the truth are of utmost importance. It’s not what we think we saw or heard, but what actually took place (vs. 16). The gathering of one or two more is not about persuasion by numbers and force but through the establishment and confirmation of fact and truth. The word for ***“show”*** carries with it the idea of presenting evidence and making a case.
3. Reconciliation and forgiveness doesn’t take place without listening (cf. Jas. 1:19).

Verse 18 states, ***“Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”*** A similar statement is made by Jesus in Matthew 16:19 specifically to the apostles after Peter’s confession and speaks of their authority on earth to ***“bind”*** what has ***“been bound in heaven.”*** Here in Matthew 18:18, Jesus speaks of the binding (and loosing) of sin based on whether one has listened and repented or not. When a child of God listens to those who come to him and lovingly rebuke him, and we extend our forgiveness to him, we need to know that God has already extended His forgiveness to him because he has obeyed the will God. And if the one who has sinned refuses to listen and repent and he is considered as a Gentile and tax-gatherer, know that he remains bound in his sin by God. When we carry out these instructions regarding an erring brother or sister in Christ, we are acting with God’s approval. The binding and loosing are stated in the future perfect indicative which refers to that which is in a state of completion. The forgiveness – or lack thereof – exercised by faithful brethren has already been completed in heaven.

Heaven’s will concerning the binding or loosing of sins is applied on earth through our obedience to the apostles’ teaching. Peter first declared on the day of Pentecost the means by which mankind could be loosed from their sins (Acts 2:38) and the first century Christians are to continually devote themselves to what the apostles taught (Acts 2:42) as they were guided by the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:13). Jesus said to the apostles in

John 20:21-23, *“Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’ And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.’”* By following the apostles’ teaching regarding the forgiveness of sins, we do heaven’s will by heaven’s authority.

It is in this context of following the will of God regarding the forgiveness of man’s sins and offenses that Jesus says in verse 20, *“For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”* The expression *“in My name”* is to be understood as *“by My authority”* or *“in accordance with My will.”* When two or three are gathered to do that which Jesus has authorized (i.e., to forgive the sins of a brother who listens and repents), Jesus stated that He is *“in their midst”* and we are in fellowship (literally – jointly participating) with our Lord and Savior.

To take verse 20 as authority for several to go hunting or golfing, or for a family to go on vacation, rather than assemble with the saints to worship God is a total misapplication of this passage. To use this verse as our authority to take the Lord’s Supper to someone who cannot assemble with the saints is to miss the point of Jesus teaching. This verse doesn’t give the church authority to establish truth (1 Cor. 4:6; Gal. 1:8-9) or teach that Jesus is with us regardless of what we do (2 Jn. 9; Matt. 12:46-50). Rather it is teaching us to respect what God has revealed through His Son and His chosen apostles regarding the conditions for the forgiveness of sins. – *Fifth Street East church of Christ Bulletin*, March 25, 2018. ■

Predestination

By Kyle Campbell

Are some people predestinated to be saved while others are predestinated to be lost? If this true, would it make any difference for one to do right if he is predestinated to be lost?

Predestination is definitely a Bible topic, but not in the way which espouses that every individual has been handpicked by God to be either saved or condemned. The critical question is, “Did God predestinate the man or the plan?” God predestinated a system of salvation by grace through faith in Christ. God did not set up the popular system of predestination for the following reasons:

- It would make God a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9).
- It would make God responsible for the damnation of the wicked (Ezek. 18:21-23; 33:11).
- It would deny that God wants all men to be saved (Mk. 16:15-16; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9; Tit. 2:11-14).
- It would refuse to accept that Christ died for all men (Heb. 2:9; 1 Tim.2:6; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:14).
- It would reject the free will choice of man (Jn. 5:40; Matt. 23:37; Rev. 22:17; Jn. 24:15).
- It would make the call to repentance hypocritical (Matt. 11:28; Acts 17:30; 2 Cor. 5:10-11; Acts 10:34-35).

God chose a plan of salvation through Jesus (Eph. 1:3-14). We cannot control who will obey no more than God can. God in His sovereignty could control man like a robot, but He chose not to do so. Whatever happens to us, it will be determined by our individual response to God’s predestined plan of salvation. – *Knowlwood church of Christ Bulletin*, February 2018. ■

“28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. 29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Rom. 8:28-30)

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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